

**TESTIMONY OF
GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY POLICY,
NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

JULY 16, 2002

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss this topic of obvious importance to the environment – elevating the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to cabinet level status.

When the Environmental Protection Agency was created in 1970 by Richard Nixon, it was a combination of 10 different units from five departments and agencies. In a message to the Congress, President Nixon submitted his reasoning for the reorganization plan that would establish the EPA. He wrote: "As concern with the condition of our physical environment has intensified...it has become increasingly clear that only by reorganizing our Federal efforts can we...effectively ensure the protection, development, and enhancement of the total environment."

This statement rings true more than thirty years later. The environment continues to gain prominence in the American consciousness and is routinely ranked among the public's most important national concerns. The scope and significance of environmental protection calls for a strong institutional framework at the federal level.

Establishing EPA as a cabinet department is not a new idea. The first bill to elevate EPA to cabinet status was introduced in the Senate in June 1988.

Former President Bush was the first president to support elevating the EPA to cabinet level, mentioning it in his State of the Union address more than a decade ago and inviting then-Administrator Reilly to attend cabinet meetings. President Clinton and President George W. Bush have followed suit with both presidential support for the legislation and a seat at cabinet meetings for the sitting EPA Administrator. Elevation of EPA to cabinet level status would ensure that EPA maintains a visible presence in future Administrations.

In the history of the Agency, our work has helped transform the way America views the environment – planting in the American consciousness a clear sense of environmental stewardship. EPA has helped underscore the universal agreement that a clean environment is valuable, not just for economic prosperity but for sustained quality of life. No longer do we

debate whether we need to act to protect the environment. Rather, we discuss how we can keep America green while keeping our economy growing.

The mission of the EPA is of vital importance to all of our lives. The actions of this Agency protect our environment and public health by ensuring the most basic of life's necessities – clean air to breathe and safe water to drink. The ability to accomplish our mission and continue to have a meaningful impact on the quality of life for all Americans to a large extent is based on our ability to more fully integrate science into our programs, policies and decisions. One of the first actions I took as Administrator was to improve the Agency's policy-making process to better integrate the highest quality science. As part of those improvements, I created the position of Science Advisor who advises me on all future science and technology issues and their relationship to Agency policies, procedures and decisions.

The importance of EPA's mission is comparable to other cabinet departments. Our mission – to protect human health and safeguard the environment – both complements and contributes to the overall service of the Cabinet. Environmental protection is as critical to public health, public security and economic vitality as the other important responsibilities currently falling under the purview of our federal cabinet level departments. As our nation's population grows over the next century, the importance of addressing environmental issues will require significant leadership and resources to meet these challenges.

With respect to homeland security, EPA plays a critical role with responsibilities that range from responding to a chemical or biological attack to protecting our nation's water supply. EPA plays a lead role in environmental monitoring, decontamination and long-term site cleanup. Our expertise in off-site monitoring, extent of contamination surveys, working with health officials to establish safe clean-up levels, conducting protective clean-up actions, and communicating technical information to impacted citizens is essential for a federal response to an act of terrorism that involves a release of biological, chemical, or radioactive material.

EPA's response to the terrorist incidents of September 11th and ensuing events (at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon) represented a major emergency management response. Later, when incidents of anthrax bio-terrorism occurred, EPA response personnel were among the first at affected sites and again led cleanup and decontamination efforts. During a crisis, the Agency works with our federal partners in every phase from the initial crisis to final cleanup. EPA also works closely with emergency response teams and independent experts to develop effective remediation tools to ensure the protection of the nation's critical infrastructures. No issue surpasses the need to protect our citizens from acts of terror, and EPA's elevation will ensure close coordination and planning with other Cabinet agencies and departments.

Already, I have found my participation at the cabinet level helpful in navigating the many important areas of overlap between the work of EPA and other departments including, Agriculture,

Council on Environmental Quality, Energy, the Department of Health and Human Services, Housing, Interior, Justice, Labor, Office of Homeland Security, and the White House's Office of Science Technology Policy. Quite frankly, I cannot think of a cabinet department with which EPA does not interact. I would consider it vital to the work of future Administrators – and vital to our country – to assure similar cooperation and participation in the future.

As Governor of New Jersey, I felt it important to have my Environmental Commissioner as part of my cabinet. As President Bush calls for increased cooperation between federal environmental regulators and state and local governments, it is appropriate to follow their leadership on this issue.

Further, the environment continues to play a central role in international relations. This legislation would bring the United States on par with the majority of rest of the G-7 countries and more than sixty others by establishing a Secretary of the Environment. Reflecting the global nature of environmental issues, EPA is increasingly involved in environmental matters that are global in nature. The time has come to establish EPA as a full member of the Cabinet. Doing so would be consistent with observations of state governments as well as our international counterparts.

I am pleased that Congress supports this important step. H.R. 2438, sponsored by Congressmen Boehlert and Borski, would elevate EPA to cabinet status and, as currently drafted, excludes extraneous policy issues that in the past have derailed the legislative process to establish a Department of the Environment. It is important that the Committee avoid any extraneous amendments to H.R. 2438, and I urge the Committee to strictly limit any changes to those that would improve organizational efficiency and streamline management.

I believe that the Boehlert/Borski bill provides the Agency with the flexibility it needs to ensure that the transition to cabinet status goes as smoothly and efficiently as possible. I am looking forward to working with Congress to develop an approach that will serve EPA's mission and the American people.

The justification for placing EPA in the cabinet is compelling. Creating a Department of the Environment will ensure that environmental protection continues to receive high priority today and long into the future. As I have said repeatedly, my aim for this Agency is to leave America's air cleaner, water purer, and land better protected than when I arrived. I enjoy the full support of the President in pursuit of this goal. Elevating the EPA to cabinet level will assure that future Administrators are able to set – and achieve – similar goals in the years ahead. Taking this step, Congress will appropriately recognize the importance of environmental issues to the American public.

Thank you for allowing me to appear before you. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

